

*a sad sounding “blue note,”  
the bending of a particular note  
by a quarter or a half tone.*

**SONG STRUCTURE** The basic structure of the standard blues song has changed little since W.C. Handy’s “St. Louis Blues” of 1914. A blues verse usually has three lines over twelve measures, or bars. The root (one) chord of a major scale is played during the first line for the first four measures, then the four chord is played for measures five and six, and the one chord is played again for measures seven and eight. The last line is different, with the five chord played for measures nine and ten and the one chord played again for measures eleven and twelve. A verse in a blues song has three lines of lyrics; the first and second lines are the same (with different chords) while the third line is different. This structure is known as “twelve-bar blues.” For example, from “St. Louis Blues”:

I hate to see that evening sun go down,  
I hate to see that evening sun go down,  
It makes me think I’m on my last go-round.

**INSTRUMENTATION** In modern blues bands with electrified instruments, there is more than one standard set of instruments. For Chicago-style urban blues, the lineup is an electric guitar and amplified harmonica as lead instruments, and a rhythm section of bass, drums, piano, and rhythm guitar. Bands from the South, such as Memphis and New Orleans, often have wind sections of saxophones and trumpets, but these instruments are rarely featured soloists. The singer’s voice has always been prominently featured in blues music, but primarily as a lead singer. Harmony vocals are rare in the blues.